

"I have never seen such clarity of thought from such young minds." Ruskin Bond

"They definitely have what it takes." Anita Nair

Story-telling has a hoary tradition in this country and this book stands testimony to the fact that the art is alive and is being carefully nurtured. This collection of 8 short stories finds young school children at their imaginative best. They cover vast ground in their first attempt at story telling: from science fiction to nostalgia to the torment of the President of a nation at war. Adjudged the best from among 7858 stories by a panel headed by Ruskin Bond, these stories are amazingly good, given that the authors are young high school students with little more experience than writing essays for school examinations.

This book is the culmination of a year-long, ITC Limited-sponsored talent search in which over 800 schools participated. The event, Classmate Young Author Contest, is based on the belief that inside every student is a unique talent in search of an opportunity. It aims to encourage creativity and unfettered imagination in students, rewarding them for putting their ideas onto paper, in the form of short stories.

Rupa & Co

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classmate

EXPOSURE

YOUNG
AUTHOR
CONTEST

someone
somewhere
at 23:13

Award-winning stories by Young Teens

SOMEONE
SOMEWHERE
AT 23:13

EDITED BY
RUSKIN BOND

Rupa & Co

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CONTENTS

Page

FOREWORD

ABOUT THE CLASSMATE YOUNG AUTHOR CONTEST

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

STORIES

ARUNIKA DAS 1
Two minutes to save the world

CHIRAAG SHASHIKANT JUVEKAR 9
Two minutes to save the world

NEENA JOY PANIKULAM 17
Reasons to smile

RAMYA RAJAN 23
Reasons to smile

SAUMYA JAIN 31
Two minutes to save the world

SHILPA V RATHNAM 39
Reasons to smile

SOWMYA PRASAD 47
Reasons to smile

VARENIA VADLAMANI 55
Two minutes to save the world

FOREWORD

By RUSKIN BOND

One of the happier experiences of the past year was my interaction with the eight finalists of the Classmate Young Author Story contest, when they and the panel of judges got together in New Delhi. It was refreshing for an old author to meet these bright young students from different parts of the country. Not only did they have talent in abundance; they were also courteous, charming, intelligent and vivacious.

There were three judges apart from myself—novelist Anita Nair, Rupa editor Indira Khanna, and child development expert Dilip Patil. They sailed through their duties with understanding and good humour. Apart from reading and evaluating twenty-four short-listed stories, we were expected to interview the eight finalists and assess their potential as future writers. At times we ended up on the receiving end. While we were interviewing and discussing the contestants, they were happily assessing us!

How did all this come about?

The event in New Delhi was the culmination of a nationwide talent hunt conducted by ITC Ltd. in association with The Activity of Bangalore, to discover and reward writing talent among students of classes nine to twelve. About 8,000 students from 800 schools spread across eight Indian cities—

Chennai, New Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Pune and Cochin—participated in the competition. They were given a couple of topics and were to write a story on one of them. Quite a challenge!

At the first stage, a maximum of ten students from each school took part in the contest. The teacher-coordinator of the school then selected the two best stories and these went on to the next round—the City Finals.

At the second stage, the City Level, the contest was held at a central venue where all the students from various schools were invited. They were given thirty minutes for preparation and three hours to write their stories. They were judged by an eminent panel of judges in each city. This round gave us the twenty-four stories and authors who entered the finals of the Classmate Young Author Contest.

I had set the criteria for assessing these short-listed stories. This included originality in theme and approach; style and grammar; story line; and impact on the reader.

After we had selected the best eight stories, the panel of judges had to assess the young authors in person, on the basis of their communication skills, observation skills, commitment to writing, creativity and inventiveness, and awareness of self and the external environment. Phew! I had no idea it took so much to become a successful author!

Of course the story itself received the maximum weightage. After all, you do not have to be an effervescent personality in order to become a famous writer. Many great authors have been shy, retiring people, for whom the written word is more important than the spoken word.

The organisers had given the participants two topics for their stories—‘Reasons to Smile’ and ‘Two Minutes to save the World.’ Our young authors were given just three hours

to complete their stories, between 2,000 to 3,000 words. I’m glad I did not have to participate. I would have required three days!

Undaunted, our young writers turned out stories that were exciting, touching, sad, humorous and above all, readable. When at first I had set out to read and assess the twenty-four short-listed stories, I had done so with some trepidation; but the task turned out to be pure pleasure.

The final adjudication was extremely difficult for all of us, as each of the eight finalists had a lot going for them and their stories.

Chirag Juvekar, a Class nine student from Mumbai, emerged the winner—but only by a whisker!

Chirag told me he wants to be a science writer, ‘I want to simplify the world of science for ordinary people to whom it is a complex subject.’ As first prize he was given a trip to Paris on an educational-cum-pleasure tour. I am sure he enjoyed the trip, although I expect that as a science writer he would have preferred a trip to the moon.

City winners and National Level winners all received prizes, and it is to be hoped that this is only the first of many similar searches for young talent—bringing to light the creativity, imagination, inventiveness and skill with words that is only waiting to be discovered and recognised throughout the country.

April 5, 2004

Ruskin Bond
Landour, Mussoorie

ABOUT THE CLASSMATE YOUNG AUTHOR CONTEST

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Man's mind, once stretched by a new idea, never regains its original dimensions — Oliver Wendell Holmes

Classmate Young Author Contest has completed its first year with the publication and release of this book. If one were to go back one year, when this contest was still an idea in the ITC Limited Greeting, Gifting and Stationery Business, nobody could have envisioned that the event would travel so far.

The contest reached 800 schools in eight cities and saw the participation of 7858 students. Apart from the school fraternity, it received the support of many eminent personalities in the eight cities, every form of media and of Rupa & Co., leading book publishers in India.

The belief in ITC Limited is that this became possible due to the strength of the idea that inspired the contest. The contest was borne out of the need to deliver the concept of

Classmate, ITC Limited's Notebooks brand to its audiences – students, teachers and parents. The event had to fulfill the Classmate range of notebooks promise of being 'Your Best Buddy'.

A whole lot of collective looking back to school life began. One just remembered the competitive environment and the never-ending chase of 'marks'; creative and sporting ambitions that were sacrificed at the altar of the 'suitable' career. Thus evolved the idea to provide an avenue for children to let their imagination run free on paper and take the form of short stories, helping them rediscover their inherent creativity along the way. The idea was sanctioned by schools and parents as well, especially because the last few years have seen the rise and recognition of several Indian authors.

Thus the contest took upon itself the task of the discovery and nurture of creative talent in children. The design of the event was to be such that it would be fun for children, with no fetters being placed on their thoughts and ideas. And thus was born the Classmate Young Author Contest.

The idea was shaped with the help of a number of people apart from ITC Limited. The Activity, an event management company that had experience working with schools, and Sampark Communications Pvt. Limited helped shape the way the event was held in the first year.

The event had three levels – School Level, City Finals and the National Finals. The School Level involved short-listing and nomination of students to represent the schools in the City Finals by their own Teacher-coordinators. The City Finals for these students threw up three authors, short-listed by an eminent jury of leading authors, literary personalities and educationists resident in that city. The twenty-four stories from the eight cities were then evaluated

by an eminent National jury consisting of Ms. Anita Nair, an eminent author from Bangalore, Ms. Indira Khanna, an experienced editor with Rupa and Mr. Dilip Patil, an industrialist and a Child Psychologist, along with Mr. Ruskin Bond, the National Jury Panel head. Eight top stories and authors were short-listed for the National Finals, Author Round, which was held in Delhi. The stories appearing in this book are those written by the National Finalists – Author Round.

This book is a perfect example of how good ideas always find support. Mr. Mehra of Rupa & Co. suggested that the book of the winning stories be published. He helped bring Mr. Ruskin Bond on board to guide the final stages of the event, to evolve judgement criteria for the National Finals and to head the National Jury Panel. Mr. Ruskin Bond went a step further by volunteering to edit the book. The event gained in stature and a whole lot of credibility in the short span of one year due to the ever-increasing tribe of its well-wishers.

This is why the people at ITC Limited are convinced that it is time to take this idea further, to increase its scope far wider with many more participants, more prizes and more reach. Classmate Young Author Contest is now ready to be taken to all the Young Authors nationally, to those who should be recognised for their talent and inherent skills.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

What is now proved was once only imagin'd — William Blake

It has been just a little while since the Classmate Young Author Contest was launched in September 2003. Within this short span of time, this contest has grown amazingly in stature and has brought the core proposition of our notebooks brand Classmate to countless number of people.

This book owes itself to the contest and the people who contributed to shaping and building it. It was just a thought last year and yet today it exists as a testimony to the event that Classmate Young Author Contest has become. It is also the best possible reward for the eight Young Authors, who qualified for the Author Round, National Finals of the event.

Classmate Young Author Contest is a powerful idea that came to fruition over the last few months. The idea of

rewarding unfettered creativity in children evolved with the help of several partners. ITC Limited would like to thank each one of them for their contribution in making this a national event of great stature. Among these, we would like to thank The Activity, Sampark Communications Pvt. Ltd., and Seventy India, who helped us evolve the idea into a workable and, in the end, a very successful contest.

This book, comprising the stories written by the top eight authors, originated in discussions with Rupa. Mr. Mehra of Rupa & Co. and Mr. Ruskin Bond, who very graciously agreed to edit the book, deserve a special thanks from ITC Limited for their amazing support for an event which had no history and just an honest promise for the future.

This contest revolves around school children and their creative talents. We found that our closest support for this event came from the schools. For this, all the schools, their esteemed faculty and the students deserve our heartfelt appreciation. They are the ones who deserve the most accolades for the event and the book. They have given us the courage to dream big for the time to come.

Chand Das
Chief Executive Officer,
Greeting, Gifting and Stationery Business,
ITC Limited. Chennai.

Arunika Das



Arunika is an 18 year old from Our Lady Queen of the Mission, Kolkata. The only National Finalist from Kolkata, she was always in the forefront in the jury interaction round, picking the brains of the panel on what it took to be a successful author.

Writing for her is the means to put thoughts and feelings into perspective. Her story takes its inspiration from the myth of Pandora's box. The message in her story rings true in all of our lives. The outcome of the fight between good and evil is not always immediately apparent. The duty of the righteous is to keep striving on the path of goodness.

She enjoys reading, listening to music and swimming. Her choice of career is a toss-up between Medicine and Bio-chemistry. Her favorite author is Ayn Rand.

Arunika was awarded the Jury Special Mention Award for her authorship.

TWO MINUTES TO SAVE THE WORLD

BY ARUNIKA DAS (KOLKATA)

My story begins before time was measured, chronicled and recorded on the pages of history, before man had conscious thought, when the world was an infant and myths of the Norse men ran rampant in middle earth.

The Earth was just beginning to form her contours, and deserts and dunes alternated with the sea of Telhys in asserting itself. Civilisation was a speck in the distant horizon and of the five elements only four had been recognised for no fire was yet to be named and given the exalted status of an element. It was at this time (pardon me, figuratively speaking for time had not been realised then) that a black box arose out of the churning bowels of the earth. That

fateful box and its contents were to be inexplicably but inevitably woven into the fabric of the lives of my ancestors and myself.

I have been remiss in not mentioning my identity but, I think, I shall reserve that piece of enlightenment a little longer. To get back to the box, its contents were said to be ominous and downright dangerous or so the gods claimed. The Norse, Greek and Roman pantheon of gods and goddesses were involved in heated altercations about the unknown contents of the box. Treys and Thor, Juno and Jupiter, Dis and Posidors were all at a loss to explain the sudden appearance of this box, which Sybille incidentally took to be an omen, portentous of evil. Not that any omen heralded good news but this one was exceptionally evil. Though her prophecies had a terrifying ring to them, the gods had developed an innate habit of ignoring her and most of the goddesses too were staunch supporters of the dictum 'Ignorance is bliss'. No wonder most of my prayers go unanswered, but to get back to my narrative, none of the gods actually knew the contents of the box, and every time they tried to probe its depths they would draw a blank. They did not let the opposing pantheon of gods get wise about this sorry fact though. Reputations had to be maintained. Their charming halos would not be able to survive a scandal.

Jupiter was especially flustered. According to him, he was the supreme ruler and he should be able to ferret out the truth about the box. He decided to go to the Creator. That plan came to naught too as the Creator sent him back to his glowing abode with his tail between his legs, umm figuratively speaking, and offered him only a smug smile as an answer. Insecurity started to plague the peaceful haven of heaven and middle earth was restless too. Rumours began to spread like fire about the going-ons deep in the core of the newly born world. Fights broke out amongst the gods, the opposing gods and goddesses hurled petty threats

and accusations and the box silently watched the chaos it had created without raising the proverbial finger.

Jupiter and Juno held council with Jesus and they decided that the box had created enough trouble without it being opened and it had best remain like that. Juno started to protest but swallowed her curiosity after receiving a quelling glare from Jupiter. They decided to bury the box deep within the earth suspended between middle earth and the world where no one would be able to dredge it out. The matter being resolved, the gods heaved a sign of relief. The gods had regarded the box as a mockery, a threat to their abilities as celestial beings. With the box safely shelved away they could return to being complacently omnipotent.

So the box waited passively, awaiting its chance to carry out what it was created for. Years went by, centuries went past, the world grew older, wiser, civilisation reared its head (ugly or pretty is a matter of your opinion), people lived and died and loved (not necessarily in that order, of course) and the box lay suspended, a silent spectator to the glories and victories, death and destruction, revolution and rebirth which swept over the world in waves over the ages. It was now that the pages of history would cease to turn and fate too would make a wrong turn. The box was about to enjoy a small private joke...

A girl named Pandora had a certain box in her possession. The story of how she acquired that box was.... ahem.... history, I'm afraid, but I am sure all of you who have been keeping track of the various legends are aware of the rest of that unfortunate story. Jupiter and Zeus frantically consulted one another trying to figure out how the box had wormed its way out of imprisonment. However it was hastily closed and returned to its hiding place, this time under the surveillance of Mercury and Neptune. They were ordered never to let the box out of their sight. Thus yet again many

years passed and the box decided to revise its contents to make it that little bit more lethal, a formidable weapon worthy of confusing the heavens. A few illustrious cavemen had discovered fire in the meanwhile and its uses were innumerable but so were its drawbacks. But people slowly learnt to control it, or so they thought. The box had a penchant for abstract fiery things and an idea began to form in its mind...

Year 3010

Enter yours truly. My name is or rather was Porphyra. I am a marine biologist and have consequently changed my name to suit the times. You can call me Gemini 401. Naming proceeds something like this—you join a profession or some group or a confederation and you acquire the name of that organisation or vocation accompanied by your registration number. I decided to take on the name of my group rather than my profession as I didn't take to the idea of being called Bio-401 all the time. Made me sound like some sixth subject in a school curriculum. Incidentally, Pandora was my ancestor. But after the aforementioned debate I think the family disinherited her—got to protect our shining armour, can't have chinks in them.

I was in an under-water excavating expedition in a nuclear powered state of the art submarine when it happened. The deep-sea diver lowered the automated drill into the bed of the sea. Immediately the sea began to churn and swirl and storm around us. According to the meteorological reports this was to be taken as an anomaly and code red was to be executed, which translated, meant worry for the inconvenience caused by our faulty reports and would you kindly pull out now. The sea continued to treat us like hostile enemies. But we could not pull out as the deep-sea diver was still down there. We decided to go ahead with our mission. We lowered the bathyscape and came up against

something hard and impregnable. Exchanging the instrument for a remote control automated glove, which was a modified version of the crane, we lifted it out of the bed and pulled it into the hull. Venting our ballast we rose up to the surface and the deepwater specimen was taken to your laboratory at the top of the sky town despite the vehement protests made by the sea.

At that time I was ignorant about the incidents that had led up to that fateful expedition so when I saw a box sitting on our observation table, I almost laughed out loud. We had gone to such lengths to investigate a harmless box?! According to our reports, unidentified objects were emanating from that part of the sea and we had been asked to investigate. Unaware of the apocalypse that awaited us we opened the box...

'...Dust to dust, ashes to ashes....' were the words I heard when I regained consciousness. Mercury sat looking sadly at me. 'We tried to stop you but you wouldn't let up. Runs in the family, I think,' he said. I realised I was not really surprised to see him. I asked him to explain. 'The box had created the antithesis of fire. The laboratory exploded and the alter ego of fire is on a spree of destruction and we have exactly...' I did not let him finish.

'The lab exploded? But—' I stuttered. 'Yes, my child, you are indeed dead and have joined us but we have some pressing matters to attend to,' he said. 'We have exactly two minutes to save the world.'

'If that is a joke, it's a bad one.' I said.

'It is no joke, think of some way to counter the fire. Water is not an option, this fire seems to absorb water very well. Think fast!'

Okay, I thought, we are in trouble, which is the

understatement of the decade. What would stop the invisible fire, I wondered. The clock was ticking—there were only one minute and thirty-six seconds left to the deadline. I could hear the angels singing in mournful tones, which was not helping in the least. The gods were anxious for they did not want to have to start from scratch again. Jupiter looked at me beseechingly and I managed a wan smile. Meanwhile the fire spread like an orange plague licking at the essence of life and swallowing it in a terrifying display of power.

My mind seemed to have become numb. Time seemed to freeze; only the inexorable end hurtled towards the world and its people. If water could not stop this alter ego of fire then...wait a minute, I thought, what about fire. Fight poison with poison, so fire with fire. I rushed to Mercury who set off on his winged feet at once. Fire who had been hiding was summoned and asked to confront his alter ego. There were only fifty-eight seconds left. Quaking with fear we had to literally push him into the path of his destructive alter ego. The effect was explosive and incredible. Matter and anti-matter—or should I say fire and anti-fire—dashed, blended and was completely annihilated. The world was saved though it was only a charred image of its previous glowing self; but it was intact and we could breathe again, metaphorically speaking. The world was still shaking from the repercussions of the explosion, which was spreading through the universe. Even the gods flinched, such was the potency of the explosion. We let Neptune wash away the blackened debris and we left the rest of the reconstruction to the men and the angels. Suddenly we realised that something was missing. After the brilliant flare, darkness had thankfully settled in. We looked at the star-studded palate of the heavens and contemplated a happy life. Somewhere in the space-time continuum the box smirked. It had been victorious. In the expanse of darkness above the world the sky held no promise of light or dawn. Fire being destroyed, the sun was gone. Only glowing embers

remained which would soon die out.

Had we really saved the world or simply stalled its end...
The box smugly watched as desolation captured the world
in its steady grip. But...

The creator said, 'Let there be light!!!' And there was
light...

Chiraag Shashikant Juvekar



When quizzed on his favourite author, Chiraag took less than half a breath to name Michael Crichton. This 14 year old from the Modern English School, Mumbai loves science and science fiction. His interests are reading, computer games, painting and astronomy. His career ambition, keeping his likes in view, should not be difficult to guess. It is to be a research scientist in Physics or Astronomy!

He writes science fiction and his favourite storyline is how science will impact mankind. His approach is that of a humanitarian. The story that he wrote for the contest was spun around an artificial fiber that replicates itself and becomes a threat to mankind.

His favourite words are 'The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new lands, but in seeing the lands where you live with new eyes'.

Chiraag Shashikant Juvekar was crowned the Classmate Young Author for the year 2003.

TWO MINUTES TO SAVE THE WORLD

BY CHIRAAG SHASHIKANT JUVEKAR (MUMBAI)

Location: Somewhere in the Andes, South America

Time: 06:11:03 (local time) 22 March, 2004

The pitch-dark sky is brightening up. There is about half an hour to sunrise. The small, rudimentary helipad is gearing up for another landing. Suddenly the sound of chopper blades is heard. A black dot is taking the shape of a helicopter in the sky. From the looks of it, it's a state-of-the-art Sukhoy-113. The latest design added to the Russian Air Force.

As it lands, an elderly gentleman with an air of authority becomes visible. After the Sukhoy lands the gentleman comes

out, escorted by guards. He steps into a small compartment, which look like a tall box. The badge on his chest indicates he is Mikhail Tarkorovsky, head of department of molecular studies, defense laboratory, Moscow, Russia.

At once the mechanism cranks up and the innocent-looking compartment acts as an elevator to the most secure and secret complex on the face of this earth. Dr. Tarkorovsky paces towards a highly protected and confidential room. His face shows no emotion. As he enters the room a Chinese lady by the name of Lou Xing greets him. The room is a perfect laboratory, surrounded by test tubes, and beakers containing thousands of chemicals.

'I demand an explanation for this. Why have I been dragged into some rabbit hole in the Andes? Why?' booms Dr. Tarkorovsky.

'I am sorry for the journey, but you must see this. The experiments on methanol. They are startling. We could make a revolution if this thing works,' explains Dr. Xing.

'Dr. Xing, you have literally kidnapped me from Russia at midnight, flown me half way across the world and taken me to some unknown lab in South America, to show me your experiment on methanol, a fluid that the common man knows as formalin with the chief use of preserving dead organisms. A brilliant plan, I must say,' said Dr. Tarkorovsky showing some emotion at last—that of sarcasm and utter disgust.

'Yes I agree, Dr. Tarkorovsky, that methanol is completely useless except for preserving dead organisms. But look what happens when I pass a jolt of electricity with a voltage of 22,000 volts through it,' replies Dr. Xing patiently.

Dr. Xing turns around and cranks a lever. The beaker to the front—which is filled with a transparent liquid, with a

tinge of yellow, and a wire submerged in it— begins to shake. Along with it the lights in the room flicker and a thread begins to form. It continues to grow and grow until the entire liquid is converted into thread at which point Dr. Xing pulls the lever again and the thread stops growing.

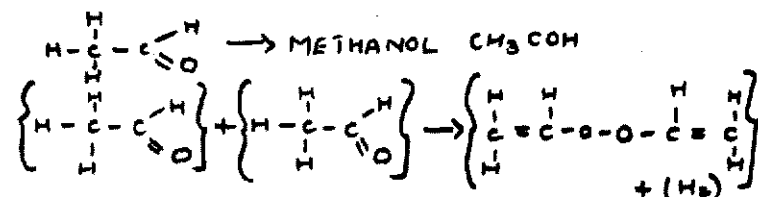
Dr. Tarkorovsky is rooted to the spot. From his ashen face one would think he has seen a ghost. He finally opens his mouth, 'Wh... what was that thing?' Calm as ever Dr. Xing replies, 'That was the molecule chain synthesizer. If you would like to collaborate on this project, I would certainly accept your expertise at Omega Base.'

Location: Omega Base, Andes mountains, South America
Time: 17:35:23 (local time) 3 December, 2006

The original molecule chain synthesizer experiments have come a long way. The moment of truth has come. Dr. Tarkorovsky has proposed a new technique that creates new chains, which are longer and more durable.

'How is it possible, Dr. Tarkorovsky? The methanol chain collapses after a few replications. It is almost impossible to create a long fibre out of any material,' Dr. Xing asks hysterically.

'The problem, Dr. Xing, is in methanol itself. Look at the following charts,' says Dr. Tarkorovsky.



'Dr. Xing, the process you devised works in the above manner.

The two methanols combine and give some residual hydrogen. This corrosive hydrogen breaks the chain causing the process to be useless. I plan to add oxygen to this experiment to react with hydrogen to give harmless water,' explains Dr. Tarkorovsky. 'You, Dr. Tarkorovsky are simply brilliant. Brilliance runs in your veins, I am sure,' says Dr. Xing, unable to control her happiness.

The experiments are tried again using the new process; the fibre grows on its own in the presence of oxygen. No need to plant cotton or rear sheep. The key to all these problems is solved. Just plug in electricity and fibre will grow, unplug it when you have enough. Voila! You have the fibre you need.

Location: Fibre Tech Labs, California, USA
Time: 08:43:22 American Standard Time
25 February 2007

Dr. William Mason comes out of the experimentation room. They are now trying to create a fibre which stores electricity, so the need to plug and unplug electricity will never arise. For this they try various amino acids. The latest being lysine.

Suddenly, a boom followed by a crash is heard. It has come from the experimentation chamber. Inside, sparks are flying everywhere, the fibre is growing out of control and is continuously sucking energy from the mains. The power lines overload and the fuse blows. Yes the lysine experiment has worked but it has taken a turn for the worse.

The creature is invulnerable to attack, it simply divides into two parts, each continuing to grow as a separate individual. All it needs is electricity after an interval of twenty-four hours.

Location: UN Security Council Headquarters,
New York, USA
Time: 14:56:33 American Standard Time
13 March 2007

It is an emergency meeting. What is to be done with the fibre is still undecided, in the meanwhile there are about 2,135 replications of the original fibre. The infestation has spread all over the world.

The meeting starts. Dr. Tarkorovsky and Dr. Xing begin to talk about the experiments at Omega Base and the creation of the original fibre by molecule chain synthesizer.

'The only thing that the fibre needs is electricity and oxygen to grow. As the fibre is hardwired to grow, it will continue to do so in any condition if its two requirements are met. There is no problem that the fibre will have regarding pain and damage. It will simply shed that part and continue to grow. If it is divided into two or more parts each part will grow separately as has already been seen,' ends Dr. Tarkorovsky. Dr. Mason begins, 'Now the only thing that the fibre needs is oxygen because the fibre contains lysine, helping it to store electricity.'

'Then that is what we must do,' say Dr. Xing 'We must suffocate the fibre. Without oxygen the corrosive hydrogen which destroys the fibre will stay, stopping growth as it had done in earlier trials.'

Then a joint decision is taken by the Security Council to form small squads of ten to fifteen people who will carry flamethrowers which will spew the fibre with burning petroleum. As the combustion would use up all the oxygen surrounding the fibre, the fibre would be suffocated. Thousands of combustion leagues were organised from Borneo to Alaska. Their operations were sudden, swift and deadly. With commendable precision they had destroyed

almost all the fibres.

But then again necessity is the matter of invention. The fibre too had some tricks up its sleeve. It learned to control the rate of reaction; it would grow only when it was sure that there was no risk. The one most successful at evading destruction was the one at France. In the vast plains it would hide from humans and once a day it would attack, suck its daily quota of electricity and return to a hiding place. It was a tactic so successful that in the end it was the only fibre left for the rest had been wiped out by the combustion leagues.

Another meeting of the three geniuses was held. Samples of various fibres were analysed by them, calculations were made. All results pointed towards the same conclusion. The fibre would absorb electricity for exactly two minutes. If attacked in this period it would be helpless and would certainly disintegrate.

The final battle had started—the battle of Marseilles.

Location: Marseilles power house, France, Europe
Time: 23:13:35 (E.U. Standard Time)
30 December 2007

The best combustion league in the world was hidden inside the Marseilles house, the place which the fibre had attacked for the last two days. Everybody was ready to end the plague of the fibres once and for all.

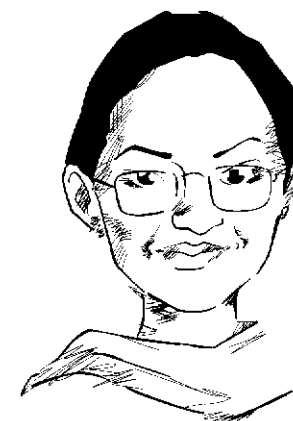
Everything was ready for the final ambush. A huge thud could be heard on the door and the door gave way. The fibre entered and began to suck electricity. The official countdown had begun. In another 120 seconds the way of life on earth would be decided.

The fibre was attacked from all four sides. The combustion

squads worked flawlessly, the fibre was being scorched but it was relentless. There were thirty more seconds to go. The fibre was pushing up a commendable fight. It was absorbing 22,000 volts of electricity/sec without undergoing any reaction.

Suddenly the fibre lost balance and fell on a sharp edge. There were twelve seconds and, without thinking, the fibre started to undergo a reaction to heal itself. In absence of oxygen, the hydrogen seared through the fibre. At once it disintegrated into its source methanol or formalin. Bitter struggle was graced with sweet victory. From then on a phrase was coined, 'two minutes to save the world', meaning very little time to complete a huge task.

Neena Joy Panikulam



Neena comes from God's Own Country – Kerala.

One of the few finalists who do not consider writing a hobby, Neena loves reading books and listening to music. At 17 years, she may first come across as a quiet and reticent person, yet Neena impressed everybody with her confidence and unassuming demeanor at the Classmate Young Author Contest National Finals. Her career of choice is Medicine.

She uses writing to express her views on the world and for social commentary. Her story revolved around the joy one should take in one's family life. J.K. Rowling and Lucy Maud Montgomery inspire her literary pursuits.

She believes that the world is a very competitive place but that should not stop one from enjoying it to the fullest. Her glass is always half full and never half empty.

Neena was the third runner up in the Classmate Young Author Contest, 2003.

REASONS TO SMILE

BY NEENA JOY PANIKULAM (COCHIN)

'Your granddaughter is here,' said the nurse to the old man. She had to repeat this several times before he opened his eyes. He was only partially conscious after the several heart attacks he had suffered the day before and was heavily sedated. With great difficulty, he looked up. He could make out dimly the outline of a girl, not more than ten, looking down at him. His granddaughter. His only granddaughter... He reached out a shaking hand and she took it in her innocent fingers, squeezing it gently. The dying man looked up at her, not able to say anything. The nurse brought the little girl a chair and not once, through the whole night, did the girl leave the old man's side, gently jiggling his limp hand, murmuring words of comfort. Not once did the child cry, though her lip trembled many times.

Every time the nurse passed, she heard the little girl,

oblivious, and yet so aware, of the sounds of the oxygen tanks and the moans of other patients, saying encouraging words to the old man. Many times the nurse told the girl to go and rest, but each time she refused.

'You know, child,' said the nurse, 'the poor man is in such a position the only chance he has is his own determination to live. He has to fight. He seems to love you child, no one else has come to visit him.' The girl said nothing, but a single tear trickled down her cheek, which she wiped away hastily. 'Bless his soul,' murmured the nurse, and drifted away.

'It's okay, grandpa,' said the girl, 'you will be fine soon, and we'll go home tomorrow.' She gave a watery smile, and for a moment, something seemed to flicker in the old, ailing man's half-closed eyes.

At dawn, a doctor came to check the old man to see how he was. He smiled at the little girl. 'It's all right,' he said. 'Now go and rest and I'll see him.' The girl hesitated for a moment and then placed the old man's hand gently beside him. 'Will he... will he survive, doctor,' asked the girl. 'Oh, he has a good chance,' said the doctor warmly. 'Now run along!' She went outside and waited, waited with bated breath for the news that was going to come. Soon after, the doctor came out, looking slightly surprised. 'I wouldn't have believed it possible. The old man's made a remarkable recovery.' The girl's eyes lit up, as if with pride. 'He's fine?' she whispered. 'He's going to make it?' 'I think so,' said the doctor. 'You must go back to him now.' She ran back, and again took the old man's hand. 'He said you're fine grandpa, he said you're fine!'

She sat by him for hours, skipping her breakfast, bath, everything, and all the time, she told him he was going to be fine, that everything was going to be all right.

At noon, the nurse called her out. 'You must go to sleep now,' she said firmly. 'The old man's absolutely out of danger, and you haven't slept all night.' And she sent the little girl off to bed. The girl slept for a few hours peacefully. Then the nurse came to wake her up. 'Get up, child, she said. 'The old man wants to see you.' The girl sat up. 'See me?'

'Yes, dear,' said the nurse. 'He hasn't been able to see you properly, has he?'

'Nurse, who is that old man?'

Startled, the nurse replied, 'Why, he is your grandfather, child.'

'No,' said the girl quietly. 'I haven't seen him ever in my life before.'

'You... you... Why didn't you say so before!' cried the nurse. Her mouth fell open for a second before she burst into tears. 'Bless you my child,' she sobbed. 'Bless you. Now, wouldn't you like to go and see the old man?'

'No,' said the little girl. 'Then he'll know I wasn't his granddaughter.'

'But—' The nurse's words were cut short by the arrival of another little girl, wide-eyed and pale. 'Where's grandpa?' she shouted. 'Where is my grandpa!'

The child who had sat for hours beside the old man smiled sadly. 'Take her, nurse,' she said. 'Then he'll be happy.'

Wiping away her tears, the nurse took the girl who had just arrived, the real granddaughter of the old man, by the hand. 'Come, dear,' she said.

The moment the old man saw the little girl, he smiled weakly. She rushed to him. 'How are you, grandpa?' she

said. 'How are you?' The old man could only smile. She threw her arms around his neck and clutched him, unwilling to let go. 'I've been so, so scared.'

The old man spoke with an effort. 'You saved my life, Martha. It was all because of you.'

'But grandpa, I've only just—' A sudden look of dawning comprehension came on her face. 'Just a minute, grandpa,' she whispered. 'I'll just be back.' She raced back to where another little girl was waiting—eyes wide, hands clasped together—and held her in a warm embrace, eyes streaming with tears. 'Thank you,' she wept. 'Thank you.'

'There must have been some mistake,' said Martha. 'Thank you for saving my grandpa's life.' They stood there, hugging each other, tears streaming from their eyes. When they broke apart, tears still flowing uncontrollably, the face of the old man's granddaughter broke into a beautiful smile, a smile that shone through the tears glistening in her eyes, a smile which could've conquered the world. 'Come,' she said. 'Let's tell grandpa.' 'Oh, no,' said the other little girl. 'We mustn't.' 'Yes, we must,' said Martha firmly, and led her towards the old man. 'Look who's here, grandpa,' she said softly. The old man, with great difficulty, shifted his head towards where a little girl stood, her eyes moist with tears. The little girl who had been with him all night, the little girl who had saved his life. 'What's your name?' Martha asked her. 'Elsie,' she replied. 'Grandpa, Elsie saved your life,' said Martha, gently. 'It was she, I only just came.'

Elsie looked at the old man, fearfully. Was he angry? Hurt? But what she saw made her heart feel much lighter. There is nothing as charming and heart-warming as a smile, which comes from an old, old man. Elsie looked at Martha, who smiled. 'Look, he is so pleased,' she said. Elsie smiled too. 'Elsie, did my grandpa remind you of yours?' asked Martha.

'No,' said Elsie. 'Mine died before I was born. I don't have one.'

'Yes, you do,' said Martha. 'I'll share mine with you.' And they hugged again. And I'll never know why, this gave Elsie a reason to smile, smile forever.

Every day we smile a number of times. Each smile is beautiful, each smile is lovely. But when a smile comes uncalled, straight from the heart, overflowing with emotion, then it's a real smile.

'As soon as they brought me here, I knew they had made a mistake. But I also knew that the old man needed his granddaughter and that he wasn't in a state to realise I wasn't her. He needed me, so I stayed.'

Ramya Rajan



This 16 year old from National Public School, Bangalore has a very simple philosophy. She believes that life is an ice cream that has to be enjoyed before it melts. This comes through in her varied interests, which include reading, writing, surfing the net, music and singing. While she is still undecided on her career choice, her options have been narrowed down to journalism and management.

Writing for her is a powerful means to spread her message. Her story centres around the setbacks in life and how one can change them into stepping-stones to success. She draws inspiration from *The Alchemist* by Paul Coelho and *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen.

Her message for one and all is 'Happiness is contagious. So, start an epidemic today!' She loves to make new friends, and has a weakness for chocolates.

Ramya was the second runner up in the Classmate Young Author Contest, 2003.

REASONS TO SMILE

BY RAMYA RAJAN [BANGALORE]

The glowing sunrays glisten on my cheeks. The wind gently blows, the wisps of air whooshing around my face. I lift one dainty foot, and gingerly place it on the cool earth. I move forward, my feet desperately but firmly grasping the ground. My heart leaps with boundless joy as I spread my arms, still moving forward, like a cautious lamb in the snow. I am walking!!

...Suddenly, I lose balance. I sway violently like a twig in the wind, I try with every last surge of energy to stay upright, but my arms are still stretched on the ground. A sharp pang of pain shoots up my legs, and my scream, my shrill scream rings in my ears...

My eyes spring open. As my dream fades away, I look around, the pain still gnawing at my legs. I find my body

on the cold floor, my legs twisted in an awkward position. My family rushes up the stairs on hearing my scream, and return me to the bed with consoling gestures and sympathetic looks. This isn't something abnormal, I fall out of my bed quite often, especially since my feet have no capacity to maintain a grip anywhere...

Confused? Maybe I should say it straight out. I am paralysed. I always was. I was born paralysed. As a baby, it was very hard for people to notice, but they gradually realised that I never moved my feet. Many medical tests and hospitals later, it was official. My parents had a paralysed daughter.

Everything was shattered so fast, I couldn't cope with the sheer speed of it all. My life quickly showed a new face to me, one that was filled with acupressure and massage treatment, with countless specialists, countless consultations. Most children grow up wanting to become an astronaut or a pilot. I grew up wanting to walk, to feel the earth beneath my feet...

I pressed the buzzer and my maid came. She lifted me off the bed and onto my wheelchair. As I wheeled my way into the bathroom, I glimpsed my pale feet on the rest pad, in the full-length mirror. Once again, I desperately wished that they would just move, walk, run for the thousandth time, and my feet remained that same, stationary way they have been the last twelve years. I slowly entered the bathroom. At breakfast, my parents asked me how I had fallen out of my bed. 'I was walking,' I told them. 'I dreamt I was walking, running'.

My parents looked at me like they were going to cry. Tears welled up in my eyes. I knew that it would take a miracle for me to walk on my own. Reality hit me when I realised that even in my dreams, I inevitably fell down, gasping, struggling, and weeping.

My typical day was miles apart from anyone else's normal day. I had a tutor who came home and imparted knowledge to me. I would then paint, read, and watch movies. I normally spent the evenings staring at the other children who played in the green park, or those who swam in the sparkling blue pool, their strong legs thrusting against all forces. I used to blissfully stare at them dancing in the rain, not knowing whether the water dripping down the glass was a reflection of my sad tears, or the rain water.

My parents did all they could to keep me happy. They took me to places, picnics, parties. I was grateful, but all my eyes captured were visions of everyone with strong graceful legs, that ran, walked, and swam under command. I would always look down resentfully at my legs. I eventually reached a stage where I would do anything to make my legs move. Anything! I had a lot of friends who supported me, encouraged me, and I had a lot of fun with them. We used to watch movies, eat popcorn, do the usual things but every time they walked, ran, and I trailed behind in my wheelchair, those same worthless feelings surged into me once again.

Most people don't understand the worth of what they have. Everyone takes their limbs, or for that matter, most body parts for granted. It's only when that ability is taken away from you that you comprehend the importance of that gift. While my friends complained about petty things, I would often tell them that those were unimportant and irrelevant, that they had all and much more. They would take another look at me and then they would have to agree. They then realised that they had enough reasons to smile. I however needed another one...

A few days later, I woke up to find everyone in a state of frenzy. I was excitedly told that a new doctor would come to visit, one that might just help me learn to walk, to take those first steps into a more promising world. I pretended

to be happy, but in reality, I had gone through a lot of false hopes and disappointments, and I wasn't so easily misled anymore.

The meeting with the doctor however, changed me. He spoke to me for a long time, about my interests, likes and dislikes. Finally, he asked me, 'Do you want to walk?' I was quite shocked at the sudden outburst, 'Of course,' I retorted. 'That won't happen though,' I added, crestfallen. 'That doesn't matter. Do you want to walk?' he asked. I thought the answer was rather obvious. Was this man completely oblivious to my problem? 'More than anything else,' I replied. 'Then you can walk,' he added, his eyes shining. 'You have to believe you can.' I nodded, trying to let everything sink in. I JUST HAD TO BELIEVE I COULD...

My medical training began. It didn't seem like a very new prospect. I had tried many new programs, new methods. This was a different ball game... the intensity of the training reached beyond any level I had previously undergone. I had many reflex tasks, many feet massages, many foot moving techniques. I was also put on a new diet, a protein diet to make my legs stronger. The doctor was so energetic, confident, encouraging, that I endeavoured to try really hard this time. Instead of waking up after a dream, feeling desolate, thinking that I would never be able to walk, I woke up with a desire to run to training and make the dream come true. I resurfaced with new energy, I proudly showed everyone the bruises and wounds I was getting from trying to walk, I firmly grasped and held on to the absolute belief that I would someday be able to walk. Of course, it wasn't easy, far from it. I would still fall, cry, weep, shriek with pain, but I would still grit my teeth, dispel the pain, and get up...

I was once watching a news report on TV, when I saw that a man had run a mile in three minutes. I was so amazed by the whole record. 'Do you want to break his record?' the

doctor asked me. I was dumbstruck! 'Do you want to run a mile in three minutes?' I nodded, my mouth fishing around for words. 'Then you can,' he said. 'But focus on walking first. You can't run a mile if you can't walk first.' I continued my training with a new zest, a new zeal. My family and all those around me provided a lot of support, but my enthusiasm chiefly arose from within me. My legs were getting stronger. They could now move on their own. They could grasp the ground for a few seconds now. They were fighting, fighting to move, fighting to run.

I was alone at home one day, when the light breeze started to heat up into a storm. The windows kept banging against the window sill. On an impulse, my feet felt the cold ground. I gasped in shock, realisation dawning upon me. I had stood up on my own! I stood there, hugging myself, weeping with joy. The euphoria was so much that I couldn't handle it. I was swept in a wave of unexplainable happiness. I was smiling so hard, I thought my cheeks would break. I had a reason to smile!

The next few weeks were spent in extreme excitement and the anticipation was nerve-wracking. My family was extremely proud of me, and the doctor was speechless. I now focused with all my heart on walking. I eventually got used to practicing with a support. My feet still had a long way to go, I still fell down, but I tried and tried. I had never tried for something so much in life.

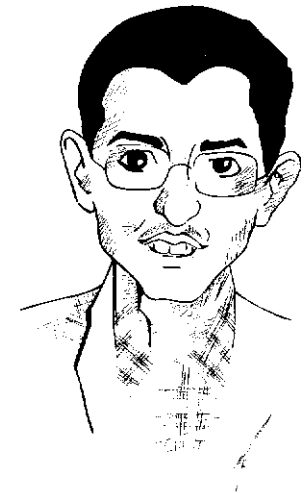
I was taken for a picnic as a reward. The venue was breathtaking, lush green grass everywhere. Everyone had gone after a rabbit, when my wheelchair suddenly collapsed to its right. I fell out, agonised and hurt. With every urge of energy, I lifted myself up. Without thinking, I put my feet out, gently moving, limping, surging forward. Everything, everyone stopped, stared at me with open mouths and alarmed eyes. The sun rays glistened on my cheeks, the wisps of air

whooshed around my face as I moved forward in the green grass, my feet planted firmly on the cool earth. I blissfully stretch my arms, laughing and crying, overwhelmed, as I run across the fields, free, footloose, and running, smiling and the emotions swirl in me, I can't believe it, but I still run...

...Five, four, three, two, one. I leap across the borderlines, the cheering, and the yelling of the crowd almost deafening my hearing. Admist roars, yells and cheers, smiles and tears, I lift my head, laughing and crying. I slow down but still running across the finish line. The sense of accomplishment resurfaces, as I see my family and my doctor cheering in the stands, their faces swollen with pride and admiration. I close my eyes, and take in everything. My life flashes in front of me, from when I couldn't run to now, when I have broken the three-minute mile record. I take in the triumphant, victorious feeling, and look down at my strong, graceful legs. I flash a big smile for the photographs and the press.

I have stood through, and walked into a different world. I have accomplished the impossible. I look up at the sky, smiling. I dreamt, and I reached my dream. And that's when I realised, you can achieve anything if you believe you truly can. And now, I have enough reasons to smile...

Saumya Jain



Saumya Jain is a 15 year old from Niraj Public School, Hyderabad. This young business executive wannabe stood out from amongst the contestants for the Classmate Young Author Contest with his expressiveness and enthusiasm. This young author believes that hard work and determination are the keys to success, and was a keen contestant throughout.

While he occupies his spare time with reading, writing, playing badminton and collecting matches, he uses writing to satisfy the artist within him.

The moral of his story was 'War is futile. No matter which side won, mankind always lost'.

His favorite authors are Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, J.R.R. Tolkien, J.K. Rowling and Ruskin Bond.

Saumya was awarded the Jury Special Mention Award for his authorship.

TWO MINUTES TO SAVE THE WORLD

BY SAUMYA JAIN (HYDERABAD)

The affairs of men are never short of uncertainty. Their life is like a long road marked with obstacles. Some they can just trod over, some they have to leap and for others, they have to force their way through. Fate has landed me in a similar situation. There is no material obstacle in front of me but the mental barrier which is holding me back is strong enough to turn the blade of the Excalibur.

Ahead of me, lies a bi-directional road. The one way leads towards the prosperity of the world, existence of earth, but at the same time, disgrace and humiliation for my nation. The other road leads towards the destruction of the world, the end of our beautiful planet, but at the same time it will

keep the flag of my country flying high. There will be pride in every face even though it would be staring at death all the while. I have now got to decide on which way I should lead my country. On my shoulder rests the fate of my nation and in my heart resides the fate of earth. Both ways I'll be the loser...

It is in the year 2051 AD and humans are at the acme of their progress. The world has finally evolved into an idealistic society. There are no enemies, no disputes. The angels of humanity and brotherhood have finally overcome the Satans of evil and hatred. Peace and harmony have so settled in the air that there is Spring four times a year. The air is festive and the mood joyful. The world appears like a fairy tale which has a 'happy ending' right from the start. People are afraid to think beyond this fairy 'bubble' for fear that their thoughts might prick it.

Just as milk always gets sour when left exposed, it takes a momentary exposure to evil to change a fairy dream into a spine-chilling nightmare. It was only a matter of days before the fall came. At a 'friendly' ambassadorial party, a 'friendly' conversation regarding cultures between my nation and another resulted in a 'friendly argument'. When there is a clash of cultural ideologies, often the stubbornness of men can be unimaginable. For when your nation, which is your identity, is the topic of insult—however trivial it may be—it boils the blood of men. A mental state cuts more deeply than a physical one. And when 'friendly' arguments take a nationalist character, the clock of war ticks into motion. It led to a situation which presented me with only one option. Their pride had taken them so far that they insulted my nation. There was a rage and fury throughout my country and they demanded a reply. There was no other way. War could not be averted. It was in the year 2053, on the morning of September 13 that I, the president of my country, declared a war to defend my nation's pride. It was a bold step, for

it is not child's play to challenge a superpower. Death and destruction was knocking on our door, waiting to be let in...

Three years have passed since the war commenced. Its wings had engulfed the entire world. It was not a world war, it was far greater than that. Death had become so commonplace that mothers smiled if their sons' bodies returned to them. Brotherhood, love, humanity appeared like mythical tales of philosophers. My army was suffering defeats and our end seemed to loom near. There was distress everywhere. Poverty and misery were like a black cloth on my country's grave. I had been expecting it, but was not ready when it came.

The fate of my entire nation was put on the gambling table in our final battle of defiance. The entire army consisting of 5 million individuals, gathered to receive a word of motivation. I ascended on to the podium. There was dead silence. In my mind, whirlwinds of thoughts were swirling so fast that I couldn't decide what to say. What should I say to these brave soldiers who all know in their heart that they are marching towards their deathbed. After all the losses we have suffered, all those miseries, all those defeats. What words could penetrate through those stone hearts. The soldiers waited patiently, almost lifelessly, for me to speak. What words of mine could push them to victory when they are tottering on the precipice of defeat?

A tear splashed down my cheek and I descended without uttering a single word. As I walked back to my room I could hear hundreds of thousands of feet stamping the ground. Their war songs echoed in my ears all the way through. The grieved picture of my country would have made an inspiring scene for a heartbroken painter. Life seemed like a burden, too hard to bear. Life had lost all meaning and was lost in the roads of human miseries. I took my violin in my hand and shut myself in my room. Inside that quiet, dull room,

life seemed to have stilled itself. I continued to play, how long I played I don't know. Time seemed to have lost its value. For the first time in life, death seemed like a heart's wish. Somebody came in the room and announced that the army was doing well. They had the upper hand on the enemy. Even this would have no effect on a man who had lost hope a long time ago.

The occurrences of the next twenty-four hours have no record in my memory. Every time a person would come and would announce the progress in the battle. The results were fluctuating. There was victory somewhere and defeat elsewhere. All my allies had surrendered and had left us alone. All this while, one thought was raging through my mind, what will I do if we lose this battle? How am I now, on the same bi-directional road. The destiny of the world lies in my hand. Only time will judge the actions of man.

I left my house and walked down the streets of my capital. Not a soul was on the road, not even an animal. The usually crowded streets echoing with noise had acquired the virtues of a graveyard. The faces staring at me from unclear windows appeared to have been waxed. Not a shimmer of hope glowed on them. Only a feeling of dread marked their white faces.

I started reviewing the memories of the past. Only a few years ago, I had been one of the happiest persons in the world. My country had wealth, prosperity, peace... we were a part of a happy earth and that fairy dream. A single spark of dispute had flared up into a catastrophe. I have put these questions to my conscience several times, 'Was it justifiable to wage this war for revenge for an insult? Was it right to put the human race on the line for our pride?' I have failed to find an answer to it, just like I have failed in everything else. I have not been a good citizen, a good leader, a good human...

I was lost in these thoughts when I distinctly heard the roar of the engines of aeroplanes. A man shot through the door and delivered the doom-laden words: 'We have lost! They are coming!'

Instead of lapsing into greater grief on hearing this news, it kind of woke me from a dream. The time for me had come to choose the right path from that two-way road. I had already made up my mind. I walked down from my presidential office into a room at the end of the corridor. Only I had the power to open this room and then to decide the destiny of earth. I stepped inside the room and shut the door behind me. Over the past few days I had been given various suggestions, whether I should make use of this room or not. My mind had been constantly in conflict...

Over the counter were three red buttons. These three red buttons could decide our future for they hold the power to launch our nuclear missiles. The impact of these missiles will completely destroy the enemy. We would have taken revenge, but in turn destroyed ourselves, for the enemy held the same power as us.

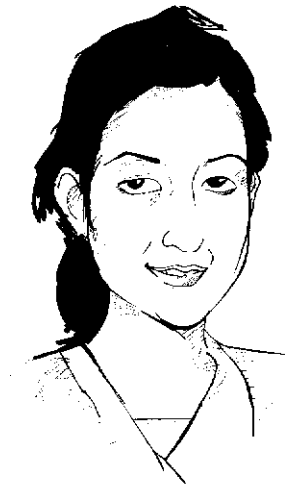
If I do not activate the missiles, it will result in my country's defeat. We will be disgraced and humiliated. We will be under our enemy's dominion. We will be worse than dead for we will lose our integrity. But, if I do launch them, then it would result in our destruction. We will die independent. Till the last moment our country's flag will fly high. Should not now my patriotic instincts prompt me to defend the pride of my country? A voice though speaks from the bottom of my heart reminding me of my duties towards mankind. Should I now be selfish as to only think of my interests, of my country, and forget about the rest of the world. What sin have they committed to suffer under the pretext of our pride? Should I not now think of ending this menace even though the price will be my country. I checked my watch. I didn't

have more than two minutes....

Slowly I moved towards the control panel. I opened the panel by decoding it. I opened the seal and the buttons danced in my eyes. And slowly, I moved my fingers towards them. I pressed the first button, the activation process had started. One minute left... I pressed the second button, they were ready to take off... fifteen seconds left... there was no other way...

The enemy's forces barged the door open but they were too late! The rockets were in position but were not launched. They looked bewildered. Lying on the floor was the body of their enemy's president. The final time, the finger had not pressed the button but the trigger...

Shilpa V Rathnam



Shilpa is already a bit of a celebrity in her own town. This articulate, 16 year old from National Public School, Chennai, impressed one and all at the National Finals ceremony with her ability to reach out to others with her thoughts and ideas.

Apart from reading and writing, she spends her free time surfing the net and hanging out with friends. Writing for her is a means of self-introspection. This is clearly evident in her story; her belief that 'What goes around comes around. If you want your life to be full of happiness, you have to do your bit to make others smile as well.' Her favourite authors are Jeffery Archer, Ruskin Bond and Shakespeare.

Her career of choice is undecided as of now but two professions that have caught her fancy are that of Journalism and Law. She believes that life should be taken one day at a time. Her motto: Life is not measured by the number of breaths you take but by the number of times your breath is taken away.

Shilpa was awarded the Jury Special Mention Award for her authorship.

REASONS TO SMILE

BY SHILPA V. RATHNAM (CHENNAI)

I put down the magazines that I'd been reading to give my tired eyes some respite. I felt like taking a stroll but one glance outside at the weather told me that was out of the question. The rains had been pouring since last night and they showed no signs of relenting.

I felt bored and that made me smile. I lived in the most prestigious mansion in the city, fitted with a video game parlour, a spectacular home theatre system, a vast library, and a state-of-the-art gym, and yet I was bored!

Well, the truth was, I was feeling lonely. Today was my sixtieth birthday, and no one had called yet to wish me. The clock clicked twelve and I thought ruefully that half my birthday had been spent reading worthless magazines.

Perhaps I should have arranged a party to remind

everyone. All my friends were getting old and perhaps their memory was failing them. My two children were wrapped up in their own lives and they lived in distant parts of the world. Shekar my husband would be busy in Italy setting a very important business deal. But even all these genuine reasons didn't console me. I would have started crying a split second later, had I not heard a cry of distress from the stairs. My kitten Snowball had squeezed herself between the intricately carved barristers and was stuck between them.

Miffed with Snowy for disturbing me I carelessly pulled her a bit too hard and she ran up the stairs with an indignant meow. I trudged up the stairs to placate her with a tummy rub (she loved that!) and I found that the door to the attic was ajar.

'Snowy, where are you?' I called. I was greeted with silence. I thought Snowy was sulking and I'd make up with a bowl of saffron milk, her favorite. My eyes swept around the attic for any sight of Snowy and I was disturbed to find the attic so dirty.

'Why not clean it up myself?' I thought. I was bored and it wasn't like I had anything else to do. I got to work with a pail of water, a mop and a bandana that I tied on my head (for a cheerful look).

I started with a big cardboard box covered with mothballs that was choking the entrance. As I brushed away the dust balls I saw two chits of paper flying on to the floor. Curious, I picked them up. They turned out to be the tickets to the first movie Shekar and I had seen together.

I still remember the day vividly. I was supposed to meet Shekar at the local café at 3.00 in the afternoon, but I had overslept, and by the time I reached the café it was 5.00. Shekar had been waiting patiently and he said 'I had been warned that Sonia was a 'Miss Late Latif' and that is why

I booked tickets for the evening show.' I had blushed furiously and was still blushing when we reached the theatre. Shekar asked me if I had overdone the routine and that's when I started laughing and felt at ease. Darling Shekar, no matter how sad I was, he could make me smile in a jiffy with one of his crazy antics. A rusty vase on the shelf reminded me of the time when I was sobbing because I had chipped the edge of a china vase and Shekar on seeing my tears had smashed the vase into pieces, saying that he hated it for making me cry. Dear Shekar, I missed him so much.

I told myself not to cry and got back to work. On opening the box, I found it filled with albums. I couldn't resist; I opened the first one I laid my hands on. They were the snaps of Anjali, my first daughter's birthday party. It took me an unusually long time to deliver Anjali. The doctors wanted me to go in for an operation but I had firmly refused. I knew my Anjali even before she was born. Calm, unruffled, she would take her own time and never let anyone hurry her. She would open her presents carefully, and her sibling teased her about her fetish for neatness. Her rooms were furnished in spotless white décor and one couldn't have found a speck of dust in any nook or corner. Anjali was a true genius with ninety-nine percent perspiration and one percent inspiration.

She loved math, science, history and geography. She had an extreme dislike for all the languages.

Anjali was a class topper and was admired by one and all. She was the school pupil leader, and the principal had presented her with a shield for doing an outstanding job. Anjali joined I.I.T.—the most reputed institution of science—and was now an integral part of NASA.

She married at the insistence of Shekar and myself. Kishore, the son of our family friend, was an eligible match for Anjali, and we arranged a grand ceremony. Anjali had numerous suitors, but she never encouraged them, wanting

to marry the boy of our choice. Anjali and Kishore had a blissful marriage and a charming son, Raj, who is now in tenth grade. He called me every year on special occasions. 'Wonder why he hasn't called me on my birthday?' I wondered.

I knew that if I worked on a box of albums my work would never be done. So I started on the shelves. The bottom-most shelf was filled with bright pom-poms, dolls, and trimlets belonging to Kareena, my second daughter.

Kareena was an extremely pretty baby and all the nurses used to fondle her the whole day. Kareena was like a fresh wind, a zephyr offering joy to everyone she met. She was a very precocious child and was very quick on the uptake. She was Shekar's pet, and got away with her mischief by first winning him over with her charming smile.

Our neighbors used to complain every day about Kareena because she used to upset everything in her way. She broke Chatterjee's spectacles, Rupa's crystal bowl, Kaveri's television set, and every window in the vicinity. She was the gang leader and amazingly agile. A top athlete and a popular cheerleader, she was voted 'mimicking queen' and joined Tata's Institute of Drama.

Kareena was a passionate dancer, and used to dance in all the stage shows as the lead dancer. She had started modeling when she was barely three, adorning the faces of Cerelax boxes, endorsing pens, biscuits, bikes, and everything under the sun. She was the highest paid part-time model by the time she was sixteen.

Kareena's social life was a whirl. She had innumerable boyfriends, all of them genuine 'hunks'. She frequented discos, nightclubs and parties but stuck to her morals. She had dumped many guys, because of his physical demands.

Kareena was a catalyst, triggering reactions long after she

had left. No one can forget Kareena, and even today I get calls from her high school friends enquiring about her.

Kareena loves the limelight and is one of the most successful actresses. At present she is in London shooting for her latest movie. She must have been wrapped up with the shooting (no pun intended!) and obviously couldn't find time to call. 'Or she had forgotten?' asked a little voice at the back of my head.

An ornate antique mirror was hanging near the window and on closer inspection I found it was cracked. But the reflection in it wasn't all that distorted, and I found an enthusiastic lady beaming at me. She must have had a happy life, for she had acquired quite a few smile lines. Her dancing eyes revealed that she still had a spark alive in her. The gray hair spoke of wisdom and she had an unworldly air about herself. A very pleasing reflection in her, I congratulated myself and smiled.

At that very instant I heard the clock chime five. 'That I actually stayed up in the attic for five whole hours,' I thought. But what pleasant five hours, they had been spent in nostalgic memories of a well-lived life. Memories, which had offered me so many content smiles. There are so many different types of smiles in this world: Ironical smiles, bittersweet smiles, triumphant smiles, malicious smiles, fake smiles and forced smiles. But the happiest smiles appear on one's face only when they see their children are happy.

And I'd spent a considerable part of my birthday smiling. This birthday I have received a rare gift, a gift of memories. I said 'Thank you Anjali, Kareena, Shekar for giving me reason to smile. All the reasons I ever smile lie with you.'

No sooner had I stopped talking then the doorbell rang. The stairs were dark and I found that none of the lights were working. I attributed it to a power failure, when it struck me

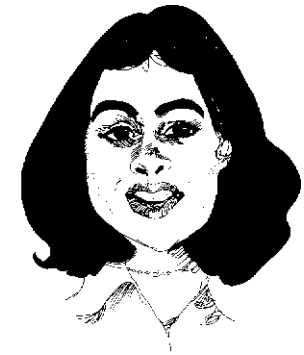
that the doorbell, which was operated by electricity, had just rung, which meant—'Surprise!' yelled a huge group of voices. The lights flooded on and I saw Shekar, Anjali, Kareena and all my friends. 'We're sorry we made you wait till the evening. But we wanted it to be a surprise,' said Kareena.

'But you've been with me all time,' I said.

Everyone gaped and I said, 'Explanations later, first let's eat. I'm starved.'

Everyone started laughing and I smiled through my tears of joy.

Sowmya Prasad



This 16 year old from Sri Kumran's Public School, Bangalore counts reading and writing as her hobbies apart from philately and collecting coins. All her hobbies are about collections – words, coins, stamps and now, accolades. Her career of choice is Medicine and Bio Technology.

She uses writing as a means to express her emotions. She believes that thoughts and words can help realise any dream and considers determination and optimism as her key strengths. Her story, which took her to the National Finals of the Classmate Young Author Contest, is all about hope and love.

Her favourite authors are Jane Austen and Fredrick Forsyth.

Her message: 'It is necessary to ink what you think. So, happy scribbling and scrawling to all of you'.

Sowmya was awarded the Jury Special Mention Award for her authorship.

REASONS TO SMILE

BY SOWMYA PRASAD (BANGALORE)

A smile does not cost a thing, yet it is priceless. A true smile will eternally imprint happiness on anyone's mind. A smile can say what a thousand words cannot. A smile can even take your heart away. For a human, it is important to have reasons to smile, because they become his reasons to continue living. What if... what if someone lost their reasons to smile? Too horrid to even think about? This is my story—a story about how I lost my reasons to smile but found them again.

I stepped out of the operation theatre. After ten hours of complicated surgical procedures, blinding neon lights and my brain ticking away like a bomb under pressure, I escaped. Taking a good view of the world outside the operation theatre, I drew in a whiff of air. The familiar disinfectant odor wafted into my nostrils and I felt at home.

'Excellent, Jane. I think we nipped the tumor in the bud,' came a voice. Spinning around, I saw my friend Alice. She was peeling off her gloves as she walked towards me. 'I'd say! I am sure that the man will live. The tumour had not spread too much. I suppose that is the reason you feel it was a walk in the park,' I teased Alice.

Both of us collapsed on the couch laughing. A few minutes later, I was re-fuelled with my daily dose of caffeine. Gulping down the bitter mud, we began to discuss a new procedure. This is my life. I am Dr. Jane Madison, head oncologist at John Hopkins medical center. My life revolves around my career and nothing else. Middle-aged, rich and quite happy, with a noble profession, there is nothing else I could ask for. 'Hello, Dr. Jane! Is my talk boring you? I...' Alice was interrupted by a continuous beeping sound. Her pager was vibrating violently. 'Well... Jane, I have a 171 to attend to. See you later.' Saying this, she sped off.

Tucking back a wisp of silver hair, I got up, realising I had my own duties to attend to. I went down the long, cold white corridors to see to my patients. Suddenly, I felt a sharp jab of pain in my head. It totally blinded me as I grasped the wall for support. Then the sword of pain was pulled out, as it disappeared as suddenly as it had appeared. Shaking myself, I walked into the first room, slightly dazed. There sat my youngest patient. Six-year-old, Simon was gazing out of the window. 'Yes, sir, Mr. Simon, sir! How are you today,' I chirped brightly, lifting him up into my arms. Simon was as light as a feather and his skin was cold and clammy like an amphibian. Both his kidneys were crippled with cancer. As I gazed into his face, I realised that he had been crying. 'Simon sir! Have you been crying?' I asked him gently. At the sound of these words, he crumbled and began to weep.

'I am going to die, doc Jane!' he bawled. I was stunned by his straightforward sentence. I wrapped my arms around

him, kissed away his tears and took him to the window. 'Simon! Simon sir, what colour is the sky?' I asked him.

'Blue...' he replied, wiping away his tears.

'And the trees? Simon sir! What colour are the trees?'

'Orange! No pink! No! No! Green!' he shouted. Laughing.

'Simon, do you know who made the sky and trees?' I asked looking into his white, smooth face.

'God?' Simon whispered rubbing his bald head.

'Right, and if God can make you well, Simon? Pray to God and he will—definitely,' I said, suddenly realising that a six-year-old would not understand philosophical sermons. But to my surprise, Simon nodded his head wisely.

Looking up, he flashed a 1000-watt smile at me before hugging me. I smiled to myself. Giving hope and love to terminally ill patients is most important but what is more essential is to remind them of the reasons to smile. I was walking back to the office when I felt a sharp sear of pain again. I moaned in agony, clutching my head. The pain set my head spinning and, unable to retain my balance, I collapsed on the cold tiles.

My head was throbbing with intolerable pain as I regained consciousness. I opened my eyes, panting for air. I tried to get up, but I felt stiff all over. My vision was slightly blurred as I squinted in the brightness. Suddenly, Alice appeared and lay a warm hand on my forehead. 'How are you now, Jane? Any better?' she asked, her blue eyes overflowing with concern. 'Yes, I think so. What happened to me? God! I think it must have been those sleeping pills I took last night...' I muttered groggily.

'Sleeping pills...hmmm...', Alice observed thoughtfully

and scribbled on a piece of paper.

'Alice, what is that? What are you writing? Tell me what's wrong!' I snapped angrily with a sudden burst of energy.

The room was quiet. I heard the gentle hum of the air conditioners. The clock's monotonous ticking seemed to be magnified in the blanket of silence which had engulfed the room. Alice walked up to me and held my hand. She drew in a quick breath and said, 'Jane... You have been diagnosed with advanced cranial cancer.'

The room grew even more silent. I felt my insides freeze. My heart skipped a beat and seemed to stop in mid-air. My stomach dropped down and I opened my mouth to speak. The blunt words seemed to have stolen my tongue. I was still staring at Alice. She stared back waiting for a reaction. I did not know what to say or do. I just stared at the furniture then the roof.

It was a few minutes before my brain started functioning again. My eyes were filled with tears and my jaw trembled as I, dumbfounded, echoed, 'CANCER?'

Yes, it took me several minutes to find my voice, even longer for the reality to seep in. By then, I was alone in my office. The rain was lashing out from the deep purple and inky blue skies. I just lay on my couch. Throughout, only the word 'cancer' was reeling through my mind. Cancer, cancer, cancer. I, a renowned oncologist, had cancer. Advanced cancer. I knew what that meant. In fact, I knew too much about this deadly disease, which made things worse, because trust me, ignorance is bliss. I started weeping uncontrollably. I wept, bawled, howled. I questioned God about the injustice, 'How could you! How could I of all the people have cancer?' I banged my table as the saline waterworks flowed out. I shook my head in disbelief, as I knew that at that very moment my body was being eaten

alive inside. My stomach churned as the horrible reality struck my head again and again, like a bolt of lightning.

A soft knock at the door broke my epoch of melancholia. Alice entered the room and just stood there. From her face, I could tell that she had been crying too. She came and sat down next to me. For the next few minutes, neither of us spoke. I savoured the comfort of having a friend and she, I am sure, was sinking in agony.

'Jane... I am so...Jane?' Alice began quietly.

'Alice, I know. God, I know.' I interrupted her.

Then again, silence flooded the room. Tears started to slide down my cheeks again. I was tired of crying and my body agreed because my eyes were stinging.

'Jane, don't feel sorry for yourself...please... Jane! Don't cry! It's not the end of the world,' Alice comforted me desperately.

'You are right, Alice. It's not the end of the world. It is the end of my life!' I shrieked.

'It's easy to tell me not to worry, isn't it? But, I know! I know, Alice, that I will be dead in a few months!' I screamed angrily. 'I know that in a few month's time, I will be six feet under! I know the twisting pain of chemotherapy, I even know my chances of survival!'

By now, I was howling as I saw my perfect world crumbling before my eyes. Alice was quiet, but only for a few seconds. 'Jane,' she began again, 'if every person in the world forgets about hope, reasons to smile and the bright tomorrow, then the world today would have been a heart wrenching and miserable place. I know it's difficult for you, but I want you to remember that we all here for you...'

I cried even harder and hugged Alice. We both just sat

there for what seemed like eternity. She comforted me and introduced me to cancer from a counsellor's view, not that of a doctor's. As I saw my magical world crack to pieces, my heart was being torn. Death may just be an adventurous holiday after life, as some may put it, but I wasn't particularly looking forward to this vacation. Especially because I knew I had no return ticket.

A week later, I was ushered into my second session of chemotherapy. The nurse looked slightly nervous but she gave me an encouraging smile. I lay down and mentally adjusted myself for a painful session of treatment.

An hour later, I rushed out of the room with my head throbbing dully. The pain tingled my whole body. The chemotherapy was becoming more and more intensive. I walked outside the hospital. The lush green trees waved their branches at me. The rows of roses seemed to nod at me. The sun was beaming down on the world. My eyes were laced with tears once again. It wasn't too long back that I would smile at nature's creations. My heart used to explode in happiness at the very sight of a deep blue sky. Now... now I just strayed between the blurred line dividing life and death. I would either be a victim of death or count my blessings for living in a few months. The park was dotted with people. Some patients had sprawled on the lawn, reading. Others were studying ripples in the pond. Suddenly, a flash of blonde bounded towards me.

'Doc, Jane? Hi!' a shrill voice yelled. I realised that a small boy was staring up at me. His hair was shining in the sun. 'Simon? Simon sir! Simon, how are you?' I said excitedly. I could not believe my eyes. The little boy who had been white and bald a month before was now sporting a tan and blonde hair.

'I am fine, Doc Jane! I am going to be dischar..dis... I am leaving tomorrow! For good! I am never coming back

here, ever again! Never, ever, never!' he said happily, casting a terrified look at the tall formidable structure of the hospital.

'Good for you, Simon sir!' I congratulated him.

'Is it true you also have cancer?' he asked bluntly. He paused for a while.

'What colour is the sky, doc Jane?' he asked.

'Blue,' I replied absent-mindedly. 'And the trees?' he asked.

'Green...' I whispered. He had caught my attention.

'When God can make the sky blue and trees green, then he will make you fine. Pray to him, doc Jane. I did and look at me today. I am going home!' he bubbled joyously and sped away towards the marble fountain.

I smiled as tears sprang into my eyes. In my melancholic view of life, I had forgotten the true essence of life. It was essential to believe in God and in miracles. It was important to remember how to live. I had to look towards the horizon for a brighter future and a better tomorrow. And this very hope for living, made me smile. The belief that I would live to see tomorrow gave me a reason to smile. At the realisation of one reason, I am still counting all the reasons to smile. All the reasons to live.

Varenya Vadlamani



Varenya is a 15 year old from Nasr School, Khairtabad.

She counts Reading, Writing, Elocution, and Social Service as her hobbies. Her career plans include Engineering followed by a Masters Degree in Business Administration.

She writes to depict the world the way she sees it. Her writings are full of vivid imagination and the author clearly possesses a keen sense of humour. Her story is about a student who travels back in time to prevent the assassination of Julius Caesar. The motive – save herself the trouble of having to digest Shakespeare's epic play in the course of her studies!

Her favorite quote is 'Two men look out through the same bars, one sees the sand and the other sees the stars'. She herself comes across as a person who always looks at the positive side of life.

She loves holidays, and considers P. G. Wodehouse and Dan Brown as her favourite authors.

Varenya was the first runner up in the Classmate Young Author Contest, 2003.

TWO MINUTES TO SAVE THE WORLD

BY VARENIA VADLAMANI (HYDERABAD)

I woke up with a start with my alarm clock ringing. With misty eyes I looked around. I rubbed my eyes to see better and to get the sleepy feeling out of my head. Suddenly I looked at the clock, it was 5.30 a.m. and I had a train to catch at 7.00 a.m.! I leapt out of bed. I didn't bother to fold my blanket. I ran into the bathroom and quickly had a shower. I ran out once again, this time to my room. I picked up my suitcase and shoved in enough clothes for two days. I went down and greeted my mother before sitting down for breakfast.

I ate as fast as I could. Then, I was reminded of the horrible reason why I had to go to my uncle's house. I loved

English. It was my favourite subject in school. I am laying emphasis on 'was'. Ever since we got a new teacher I had been hating it. The poetry was fine, the prose was bearable, but drama! I didn't understand a single word. *Julius Caesar* by William Shakespeare is really not an easy book. And to actually learn it!! I agreed wholeheartedly with George Bernard Shaw when he said that prisons are better than schools because people are not forced to study there. I was going to my uncle's house since my aunt was an English professor and she had to help me with drama.

I quickly got into our car after hurried goodbyes. My mother had agreed to drive me to the station, which was a good half-hour's drive away. I looked out of the window and admired the beautiful scenery. This was one of the greatest advantages of living in a hill station. I did not complain because I knew it was all for my benefit. When I returned I would probably enjoy the drama class more than anything else in literature.

As we neared the station I heard the sound of a train coming towards the station. That had to be my train. I hauled my suitcase out of the back seat and sped off towards the train. My mother waved to me as I got in and sat down. For a change, I hadn't forgotten my ticket. As my train pulled out of the station, I gazed out of the window. Then, I decided that I should read the text before reaching my uncle's house so that I wouldn't make a fool of myself if my aunt asked me any questions.

I opened my book and sighed... the next few days would not be enjoyable. As I read on I realised that learning it would be easy once I understood it. Just as I finished reading the second act, the train slowed down. I looked at my watch. I had been reading for three hours now. I looked out of the window and saw my uncle and aunt waving from the platform. As the train finally came to a halt, I leaped off and ran to

them. Although my purpose of going there was not very thrilling, with just one look at their smiling faces, I knew that I wouldn't regret having gone there. I hugged them both.

My uncle offered to carry my suitcase. Although I was a little reluctant, I let him do it. As we neared their car, I saw a little pair of brown eyes peering through the window. He stared at me as I went towards him. He had his paws on the windows and his tongue sticking out. His tail was wagging nineteen to the dozen. As I entered the car Brownie leaped onto me and licked my face all over. I petted him and played with him. He was my favourite dog in the whole world!!

Before I knew it, we were at their house. I quickly got down and went into the house. They lived in an old-fashioned bungalow, which was made of wood. The house smelt great! As I passed the study I thought about the weary hours I would be spending there. I walked on till I reached the guest room where I would be sleeping. This room had an exhilarating view and as I walked towards the window to see if the mountains were still the same way as they were when I last left them, I heard my aunt calling me.

I made my way to the kitchen where she was at work. I smelt heaven... the smell of freshly baked chocolate chip cookies right out of the oven. I excitedly munched one and put a few into my pocket...

I thanked my aunt profusely and made my way to the attic. My uncle was a professor of science and a scientist too. I entered the attic through a little opening in the floor. As I entered, I gasped as I saw the number of complex machines that were there. My uncle beckoned me towards him and he said that he had something interesting to show me. I looked around and saw a large machine with a door. I asked him what was inside. He said, 'Your wildest dreams!'

I didn't understand. Then he told me that it was a time machine. I was thrilled. I asked him if I could try it out. He said that I could try it after he made sure that it was working fine.

I made my way back to my aunt. She was in the study. I went to her with my book and she started telling me about Rome. It truly fascinated me and I wanted to know more. She said that to really know more about Rome, I should read *Julius Caesar*. Excitedly, I started reading and my aunt explained it to me. After eating all those cookies I didn't want to have lunch. However I quickly ate a little and got back to *Julius Caesar*. It was so much fun! If only reading... but learning it was tough. I studied all evening. At night, I played with Brownie for sometime and then went to my room. As I stared at the mountains, I felt a strange sense of restlessness. I was thinking about Julius Caesar... what if he had never been assassinated... what if Shakespeare had never written about it... it would be great... I wouldn't have to learn about it all!

A thought ran through my head. If I wanted, I could change the past. I had to save all the young students from learning Shakespeare. I tiptoed to the study and climbed the ladder leading to the attic. I saw the time machine gleaming in the corner.

I looked around and saw that there were a lot of knobs. I went into the time chamber and looked around. There was a single knob inside. I turned the knob to 2050 bc. I felt a sudden jolt but nothing happened. I opened the door and screamed. I was not in the attic... I was on top of a hill. It was not night. The sun was shining. In front of me I saw a vast jungle and high peaks in the distance. I turned around and just stared open-mouthed. I was looking at the mighty city of Rome. Its columns rose to reach the sky, I could see people in the amphitheatre.

I walked down the cobbled lane and made my way to the city. I saw the people walking by...they were all dressed in flowing robes of white. They stared at me quizzically. I wondered what was wrong... it was my clothes! These Romans could never have seen a person in faded jeans and a pink t-shirt before... I stopped one of the girls passing by and asked her where I could get some robes. She laughed and led me to her house and offered one of her own. I thanked her... I wanted to give her something. I reached into my pockets.. I still had a few cookies in my pocket. I offered her one. She took it. As she tasted it, she was so happy that I could see the happiness radiating from her face. She pointed to the robes I was wearing and said, 'Thou shall keep it'.

I set off once again and realized that the streets were empty, everyone was at the senate. Caesar was in Rome. I made my way through the cobbled streets towards the senate which I had seen from the top of the hill. As I approached the senate, I saw Brutus, Cassius and Metellus Cimber in deep conversation outside. I realised that Caesar would be assassinated that very day. In fact within a few minutes... I remembered Caesar's dying words 'et tu Brute! Then fall Caesar' ... I must not let it happen. Suddenly I realised that by preventing the death of Caesar. I would not only help literature students in the future, but more importantly I would save the mighty Roman Empire from collapsing. I walked in and saw the senators seated in one corner of the senate. I walked to Antony. He was the only man who could save the day. I told him what I knew but I did not know how to convince him. Suddenly a thought struck me... I said:

'Friends, Romans, Countrymen, lend me your ears;

I come to bury Caesar not to praise him...

The evil that men do lives after them

The good is oft interred with their bones...'

He looked at me in astonishment and asked me how I knew his thoughts and style of speaking so very well. I told him how I knew. He seemed convinced. He said, 'I shall save the mighty Caesar.' But then, he wondered how to do it. I said I would help him. I looked around and saw the conspirators advancing towards Caesar. I had only two minutes to save the world from being shattered, two minutes to prevent the fall of the Roman Empire and just two minutes to prevent students from suffering in the future.

As I saw Brutus walking I stepped on his cloak, which was trailing along the ground. He fell to the floor with a crash. While doing so, he had pulled Cassius' cloak for support. It tore, revealing the hidden dagger. Antony shouted to the mob, 'These honorable men are but traitors in disguise... Look! He hath a dagger!' Antony pulled Cinna's cloak and Metellus' too. They had daggers too. The tribunes rushed towards the noblemen and snatched their daggers from their waists. Caesar was saved. He would live. In two minutes I had changed history and saved the Roman world. Antony looked at me and thanked me for saving his friend. I said it was all for everyone's benefit. Then there was rejoicing as people learnt how Caesar had been saved. People carried me on their shoulders and took me to the forum. Then, publicly it was announced that the traitors would be put in prison and a statue would be erected in honour of me. My joy knew no bounds. Two minutes had changed my life. Everything was going so well...

Suddenly a thought struck me. How would I get back to my aunt's house? I took leave of the mighty Romans and made my way up the hill. I saw the time machine and got into it. Just as I was about to set the knob to 2003 AD, I remembered that there were a lot of history lessons which I wouldn't enjoy learning. My least favourite was Adolf Hitler. I decided that it was 'time' to pay him a visit...